

help to people, and let's not delay it any further.

I was asked by somebody back in Minnesota whether I really liked last night. I was on the first shift. I said, "Actually, not so much so. I would rather be doing it on the floor of the Senate. I would rather be in a markup in committee. But I, as a Senator, will do everything I can to fight hard for people in Minnesota."

I think from talking to colleagues in the majority party, we are going to reach agreement. I believe that, I say to my colleague from Minnesota, Senator GRAMS. There has to be an agreement. That is what we have. We have to make that happen so all of us can go back to our States and say to people, "We wish this had not been delayed and delayed and delayed, but now, finally, a good bill is passed and we are going to get the help to you." That is the goal, that should be the result, and I hope that that happens this week. That is my appeal to my colleagues.

I yield the floor.

Mr. THOMAS addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming is recognized.

DISASTER RELIEF AND PREVENTING A GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

Mr. THOMAS. Madam President, we have asked to set aside a little time this morning to talk about the issue the Senator from Minnesota talks about. Each of us wants to find a way to get help to people who need it as a result of the disaster. I think there are a number of issues involved. I believe as we move toward a solution, it is useful to talk about those things.

Certainly, there are legitimate concerns on both sides of this bill. I am satisfied that our leadership is now putting together something that will be presented, hopefully that will be acceptable.

I think it is well to recognize that we want to get this disaster aid out, but there are certain things that are very important, as in any discussion, to both sides. One of them is to get something in that avoids the human disaster that might well happen in the future if we had another shutdown of the Government. So this can be one of those things.

There also has to be an understanding, of course, on an issue of where there are different points of view that both sides have to be willing to make some accommodation. The idea that somehow you can't do anything unless the President approves is not the system we have here. We have a divided Government. We have the President with authority to do what he does and the Congress with the authority to do what they do. When they come to a conflict, there has to be some movement and not simply a pronouncement that the President doesn't like that and, therefore, it won't happen. That is not the way it works.

So, Madam President, we would like to talk a little bit about that. I am

joined by my colleagues. I yield first to the Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. GRAMS. I thank my colleague from Wyoming.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ROBERTS). The Senator from Minnesota is recognized.

Mr. GRAMS. Mr. President, I was very disappointed by President Clinton's veto of the emergency aid bill, which provided some \$5.5 billion in disaster relief nationwide, with a major portion of those dollars dedicated to helping to rebuild the flood-ravaged communities of my home State of Minnesota and also in the Dakotas.

Having been with the President in seeing firsthand the damage and the despair that was caused by the flooding, I cannot believe that he was willing to reject our legislation to help support the people of Minnesota and the Dakotas as they rebuild their homes, communities, and their lives in the wake of the flood.

Our legislation sent a very clear message that the people of Minnesota have not been forgotten by Congress during this critical time, but the President's veto suggests, however, that some in Washington need to have their memories refreshed.

I am particularly disturbed by the fact that the President used as his primary excuse for vetoing the emergency flood relief bill our inclusion of a measure to protect flood victims in Minnesota and Americans everywhere from a potential Government shutdown later this year.

For reasons I have repeated on this floor many times, I believe that delivering emergency aid to flood victims and keeping the Government open for business during the rebuilding process must be our twin goals at this time.

Just as the emergency flood relief serves as an assurance to Minnesotans that their urgent needs will be met, our efforts to keep the Government from shutting down will also give them a guarantee that any budget squabbles that happen to pop up here in Washington will not affect our long-term efforts to help rebuild our State. And that is an assurance we can't afford to go without.

By vetoing our flood relief bill, the President indicated that having a leg up in this year's budget debate is higher on his priority list than delivering flood assistance to those who need it. That was wrong, but, as we know, it cannot be changed. The people of Minnesota and the Dakotas already know how well Washington politicians can talk, and they don't want any more talk; they want some action.

Stopping our work in the Senate and blocking us from taking action on anything accomplishes nothing. Positive, constructive action is what the Senate should be working on to deliver. Therefore, I urge my colleagues to join me in working to ensure that flood relief gets out of Washington and that it gets into the hands of the people of Minnesota and the Dakotas as quickly as possible.

Immediately after the veto was announced, I wrote letters to Senate Ma-

jority Leader TRENT LOTT and also Minority Leader TOM DASCHLE. In that letter, I proposed a compromise I believe will help speed up the enactment of the disaster relief legislation, while at the same time allowing Congress a separate vote, without any unnecessary delays, on the Government Shutdown Prevention Act. In my letters to Senators LOTT and DASCHLE, I proposed that they consider removing the Government shutdown provision from the emergency aid legislation with a specific time agreement for debating and voting on the two issues in separate pieces of legislation.

That would allow the Senate to debate and pass both the emergency flood relief bill and the Government Shutdown Prevention Act on their individual merits, away from the political haggling that has delayed action on these important bills.

I was encouraged yesterday to learn of the support for my proposal by Vice President AL GORE and Senate Minority Leader DASCHLE. Their announcement of support clearly shows that there is room for negotiations to reconcile our differences and to deliver the flood assistance to Minnesota and the Dakotas.

I have also been in negotiations with the majority leader, who expressed his intention to consider a number of different alternatives, including mine, on how best to move ahead and deliver flood relief.

I am going to continue to work closely with both Senators LOTT and DASCHLE, as well as my other colleagues in the Senate, to expedite this process. From the events of the last 2 days, I am optimistic that the two sides are closer to a reasonable settlement than anyone in the media may be suggesting.

Now we must take action to bridge the gap and ensure the delivery of emergency disaster relief and the continued protection of the American people from a Government shutdown.

At the very least, my proposal has opened the negotiation process to move ahead on these important issues post-veto. Again, while I am disappointed that the President chose to veto emergency flood relief, I hope that he will not shut the present window of opportunity to try to work together to find some common ground.

Certainly, my constituents in Minnesota, who have already suffered so much at the hands of the flood, cannot afford inaction.

As flood victims in Minnesota begin rebuilding their homes, their neighborhoods, their businesses, and their lives in the wake of the flood, they need our assurance that the Federal Government will deliver the aid that it promised.

Flood victims also need to know that the Government will be there throughout the year to meet their urgent needs as their rebuilding progresses.

Our efforts to keep the Government open for business will also help give Minnesotans a guarantee that budget squabbles in Washington will not affect the long-term efforts to rebuild our communities.

Now, I know we may have reached a budget agreement in overall numbers and terms, but a lot of the debate will continue. And there is still the possibility of an agreement not being reached on every part of that budget this fall which could lead to a possible Government shutdown. It has happened before; it could happen again.

In light of that, we want to provide assurances to these victims of the flood this spring in Minnesota and the Dakotas that they would not come up short this fall, they would not face a stop in the work that they are trying to do in rebuilding their lives.

Under my compromise proposal, checks would continue to go out and contracts would be honored this year—in spite of what happens in Washington. And that is an assurance we cannot afford to go without.

In announcing the President's veto, the White House spokesman said that "Americans in need should not have to endure further delay." I could not agree more with that statement.

The people of Minnesota and the Dakotas cannot afford for Washington's budget politics to stand in the way of the rebuilding that has already begun. Now that we have a starting point, let us move ahead and pass the emergency disaster relief we promised. And let us do it as quickly as we can.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

I yield back my time.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Who seeks time?

Mr. CONRAD addressed the Chair.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota is recognized.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, first of all, I feel I need to respond to the statement about the President's action. The President did not include unrelated items in a disaster bill. It is not his fault that we are in this circumstance. It is the fault of those who decided to put unrelated items into a disaster relief bill.

THE DELAY IN DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I represent the State of North Dakota. And our State has been absolutely devastated. We have people, thousands of people, who are still sleeping on cots 54 days after the disaster occurred. Fifty-four days after the dikes broke, we still have thousands of people on cots, people living in cars, people whose homes and businesses have been devastated. And they cannot understand why Congress fails to act.

Mr. President, last night we had a linkup via computer with people who are the leaders of the Grand Forks community—the mayors of Grand Forks and East Grand Forks, the lead-

ers of the business community, the head of the chamber of commerce, leaders of other parts of the Grand Forks community, people from the medical school. And their message was clear and unencumbered. They have asked Congress to send a clean disaster relief bill to the President without unrelated measures, and to do it now. That is their request.

The message was powerful and compelling. People who have had everything lost, people who evacuated their homes at 1 o'clock in the morning and who have not returned since, a city of 50,000, 95 percent of whom were evacuated, with 80 percent of the homes in that community devastated. That is the reality that we are living with.

Mr. President, this chart says it, and says it clearly: Disaster Victims Held Hostage, Day 20. This is just since this Congress took the Memorial Day break without acting. Twenty days of inaction after a bill to provide disaster relief was completely agreed to.

The disaster provisions were agreed to by Democrats, by Republicans, and by the President. It is these unrelated measures that were stuck into this disaster relief bill that have hung things up. The people that I represent say, "Take them out. Quit playing politics with the lives of people. Quit holding hostage thousands of people to a political agenda. Get the disaster relief where it's needed, and get it there now."

Mr. President, this is a sign that a resident of Grand Forks put out on their lawn after Congress decided to take a break without passing disaster relief. It says, "Hey, Congress! Spend your break here!" And here is some of the refuse from the disaster in their front yard. You can see the garbage bags piled up as people try to rebuild their lives.

I have a series of photos here that try to bring this back to what this is really about. It is not about how we take the census in the year 2000. It is not about some budget dispute. This is about people who have been devastated and need help.

This is a picture from Grand Forks. This is the downtown area that not only had a 500-year flood, but had a fire that devastated three entire city blocks. Here is some of the refuse that remains from that disaster.

Go to another picture that shows what is happening in terms of Grand Forks, ND. Here is a downtown area, one of the buildings that burned up in the fire, all the rubble that is there. It is staggering. You go through the city of Grand Forks, it looks like a giant junkyard.

Here is what you see as you go up and down every street in residential Grand Forks—every street, because 80 percent of the homes were damaged in this town. This is what you see on every boulevard. All of the contents of these homes, the washers, the dryers, the carpeting, the furniture is not in the home, it is out here on the street be-

cause it has all been destroyed. And these people are asking for one thing, a chance to get their lives back in order.

They have had the worst winter in our history followed by the most powerful winter storm in 50 years that destroyed the electrical grid that served 80,000 people. They were without power for nearly 10 days, in the midst of 40-degree below weather, and then they get hit by the 500-year flood, and then by the worst fire in our State's history. Now they are hit by a disaster of a Congress that fails to act.

Never before in the face of a disaster have we diddled for as long as we have diddled on this disaster. People are asking for help. And this is the condition of their lives.

This is a picture of the business district. It is not just the homes, but it is the businesses that have been destroyed.

I ask my colleagues, if you were in this circumstance wouldn't you expect this body to act, wouldn't you expect a response, wouldn't you expect some help?

This is another picture of what people are going through each and every day now in Grand Forks and East Grand Forks—piles of garbage. This water is not just rainwater, this is water that is putrid. You fly over it, and it stinks because it is filled with every imaginable awful thing. And every home and every business is just destroyed. All of the things that are in there have to go.

This is again a picture of what is outside one of the commercial buildings, and a tremendous amount of destruction. We are going to take years to rebuild. We do not have much time.

We have a short construction season in our part of the country. By October 15 outdoor work will have to be completed. So we do not have time for political games to be played here in Washington.

Let me again repeat the message from the people that I represent. "Please, Congress, pass a disaster relief bill without these unrelated measures so the aid can start to flow."

Some have said, "Well, nothing is being held up. There's money in the pipeline." Last night we heard from the people of Grand Forks. And what they said was very clear. There is not money in the pipeline. There is concrete in the pipeline, because the money is not getting through. There is no money for the buyouts and relocation of the homes and businesses that have been destroyed. There is no money in that pipeline. There is no money in the pipeline to help the ranchers who have lost hundreds of thousands of head of livestock. There is no money in that pipeline. There is no money in the pipeline for the school districts that have taken the kids from the disaster areas. There is no money in that pipeline.